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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PORT AU PRINCE 000876

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SUBJECT: PREVAL SEEKS NEW PM CANDIDATE; SAYS HAITIAN PEOPLE WILL HOLD PARLIAMENT ACCOUNTABLE FOR BOB MANUEL'S DEFEAT

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Classified By: Ambassador Janet A. Sanderson, reason  
1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. On June 13, I met with President Preval for 50 minutes to discuss the political impasse which has left Haiti without a functioning government for more two months. The previous day, the lower house of Parliament had soundly rejected Preval's second prime ministerial candidate, his close friend Bob Manuel. Preval rejects any notion that he is in some part responsible for Manuel's failure, or that of his first prime ministerial candidate, Eric Pierre. He has no plans to approach his third nomination any differently, arguing that the responsibility rests with parliament. He denied that he did not support the two candidates sufficiently but said that he refused to trade ministerial posts and other perks for votes. I told Preval that he needed to find a way out of this stalemate, which is now having a major impact on the country and its ability to address the concerns of those in need. Preval counseled patience, telling me that these things take time. While he is indeed correct, Preval will have to seek some type of accommodation with the parliament to put a government in place; whether the famously stubborn president will learn from past mistakes remains to be seen. End Summary.

¶2. (C) At my request, on June 13 I met with President Preval to discuss the political impasse which has left Haiti without a functioning government for two months. During our 50 minute meeting, he was accompanied by political counselor Paul Denis, until I requested greater privacy half way through the session. The previous day, the Lower House of Parliament had soundly rejected Preval's second prime ministerial candidate - and best friend - Bob Manuel. Despite this rejection, Preval told me that he was at ease with his actions over the past weeks. He assured me that that he has already identified a new candidate, a "good candidate," and is awaiting that individual's go-ahead to announce his (or her) name. Preval believes that if this individual (who some believe to be FOKAL President and former Preval business partner Michelle Pierre-Louis) accepts the post, a new PM could be in place "in a couple of weeks." He provided no explanation of his optimism.

¶3. (C) Preval rejects the notion that he is responsible in any way for Manuel's failure, or that of his first candidate, economist Eric Pierre. He believes he managed both nominations correctly, presenting parliament with excellent choices who met the constitution's requirements. He has, he said, no intention to approach his next nomination any differently. He fulfilled his constitutional obligations but parliament did not. Parliamentarians bargained, bartered, and

threatened not to confirm his candidates, demanding in exchange for yes votes cabinet posts, projects in their districts, and employment for their families and hangers-on. He would not, Preval repeatedly argued, negotiate away the position of Prime Minister by trading portfolios and positions. Furthermore, Preval said emphatically, he would not "compromise" in any way.

¶ 14. (C) Preval disputed some parliamentarians' allegations that he has refused to engage with them. He told me that he has met numerous times with political parties and parliamentary blocs to discuss his PM candidates. All parliamentarians want to do, he observes, is push their own personal agendas. For instance, he said, one key demand from the CPP was support for their re-election as a bloc. Preval refused to negotiate on this point; many of these individuals "were not fit for government" and candidates should be judged on their performance, not on their political affiliation. Manuel had agreed to help Lespwa members campaign, yet they still turned on him.

¶ 15. (C) Preval argued repeatedly that he is attempting to end the politicking and "revenge" politics that has marked Haitian political life for so long. He acknowledged that there was a certain "pedagogical" aspect as well to his position. Parliament must, he stated, learn to accept responsibility for governing. It is an immature institution which has not yet taken on its full responsibilities. Parliament would be held accountable for its actions, as he is for his own. He believes, he told me, that the people understand that parliament is playing with the nation's future with these votes. Haitians will hold their representatives responsible; the more Parliament postures and rejects his candidates, the more they discredit themselves. He believes that the population will not allow Parliament to

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vote down another candidate.

¶ 16. (C) Preval conceded that the political situation has deteriorated in recent months. But he placed the blame on OPL and Fusion, arguing repeatedly that they opened a Pandora's Box when they forced Prime Minister Alexis's dismissal in April. Preval told me that he warned them they were playing with fire, that removing Alexis would destroy the governing coalition and cause a rearrangement of the political groupings in parliament. But they were determined, Preval said, to get back at Alexis for real or imagined slights. The result has been disarray and dissension in Haiti's political class.

¶ 17. (C) I told Preval that the U.S. has clearly demonstrated its strong support for Haiti over the years of his mandate. It is important that this transitional period in Haiti's political evolution - his presidency - succeed and create a good future for Haitians. We had, in response to the humanitarian crisis on the ground, ramped up our already generous assistance levels to give him and Haiti's political class some breathing space to address the political situation and create a political dialogue. The longer this process takes, the harder it becomes and the more fragile his own position is. Haiti's time is now: it is unclear when these factors - strong international engagement, a security presence, and major financial commitments - will line up again for Haiti. Haiti has indeed come a long way, but lack of a government is being felt at every level and hampering our ability to help the country - and him. He needs, I told Preval, to work with Parliament and the political parties, to find a way to move this matter off of square one. Only then could the needs of the Haitian people be met. Engaging parliament, talking to the people, these are critical duties of the president.

¶ 18. (C) Preval listened intently to my comments, but made little specific response. He counseled patience in the international community, remarking that I was the third

ambassador visiting him in the past 36 hours to express our concerns. He acknowledged that two months of governmental "immobilisme" is not good but noted that other countries - he referred to Italy and Belgium (with no sense of irony whatsoever) - had gone without governments and managed. Preval argued that there have been important changes here since 2004, and the political process in play now is too important to rush or to panic. This process, however protracted, is part of the institutionalization of Haiti's democracy. Parliament must be held accountable, it must learn it cannot function in the way it has in the past by trading favors and acting on personal agendas. Preval told me that this must play itself out "step by step." It is hard, he claimed, but there is no choice is we want him to hand over a functioning government to the next president.

19. (C) Comment. Preval is framing his argument with parliament in terms of good governance: the president is trying to impose good order and discipline on Haiti's unruly political process by insisting that parliament meet its constitutional responsibilities. It is an argument that falls short - he has equal responsibility for getting a government in place. When Preval does indeed nominate a new PM candidate, he will have to reach some kind of accommodation with the parliamentarians, or that individual will suffer the same fate as his/her predecessors. Although famously stubborn, Preval has in the past shown some inclination to learn from his mistakes. It's unclear if this indeed is one of those times. The president's political allies and friends, worried about their own futures, are pressing him to act decisively. That, coupled with our own interventions and that of regional partners, may make a difference as Preval weighs the options but the decision will be his alone.

SANDERSON